

New birds from Kakamega, Western Kenya, including new breeding records

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The Kakamega Forest is the easternmost remnant of the once more extensive lowland rain forests of West and Central Africa. Because of this, it is unique among Kenyan forests, with many butterflies, snakes, orchids, trees, and birds not found elsewhere in Kenya (Diamond 1979, Zimmerman 1972). Although there are 238 km² of gazetted Forest Reserve, only about half is still indigenous forest, the rest being grassy and bushed glades, cultivation, and plantations of indigenous and introduced trees (Tsingalia 1988). In 1985, the northern portion of the forest (including the nearby Kisere Forest) was gazetted as a National Reserve and given complete protection. There is growing evidence that the forest is not uniform throughout, with northern portions being drier and having more glades (Tsingalia 1988).

Birds from the area have been enumerated by a number of authors. Van Someren (1922, 1933), Jackson (1938), Ripley & Bond (1971), and Zimmerman (1972) base their lists at least in part on collected specimens, while Tennent (1965), Diamond & Fayad (1979), and Mann (1980, 1985) base theirs on sight records and netted birds. Together, these lists have resulted in about 330 species of birds known from Kakamega. The distribution of all birds of East Africa and Kenya, respectively, including some additional records from Kakamega, are reviewed in Britton (1980) and Lewis & Pomeroy (1989). The latter atlas provides range distributions by quarter square degrees (QSD). The QSD that includes the Kakamega Forest is 48D, from the equator to 0°30N and from 34°30E to 35°E.

In this paper I report on 37 additional species that I have observed or netted within the Kakamega Forest boundary, 18 of which are new for Kakamega's QSD. Unlike previous workers, my emphasis has not been on forest birds, having concentrated instead on the birds in the various glades.

Field work was conducted briefly in June and July 1986 and then from November 1987 to August 1988, from April to August 1989, and again from March to August 1990. Initial work was done in the area of the Nature Reserve by the Forest Department Headquarters at Isecheno (0°19N, 34°53E) in 1986 and 1987. I then moved up to the newly-created Kakamega National Reserve at the north end of the forest (0°21N, 34°52E). Most of my field work is carried out in the glades there rather than in the forest itself. Unless indicated otherwise, all observations were made at the National Reserve.

Birds new to QSD 48D

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

I have two records of this distinctive migrant. A male was seen soaring above the forest edge along the Lugusida River, near the Forest Station on 21 December 1987. An adult female was perched in *Pinus* trees (which are no longer there) at the edge of the National Reserve on 25 April 1988.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

My only record of this species is of a large, *Aquila*-shaped eagle soaring quite high up on 4 April 1989. From below it was a uniform medium-toned brown except for a single pale bar along the edge of the underwing coverts, upon which identification of this immature was based. The only other species that it could have been is the Tawny Eagle *A. rapax*, which

is often considered conspecific (Brown 1982) and is known from QSD 48D. Other unidentified *Aquila* eagles were seen on 25 and 27 March and 16 April 1990.

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*

An adult was seen well for several minutes soaring over the reserve on 7 May 1990. The combination of its large size, black chest and fine spotting on the underparts rendered it unmistakable. A probable immature of this species was observed on 2 January 1988 at the Isecheno Forest Station.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*

A very large falcon with grey upperparts and pale, lightly streaked underparts was seen first perched rather high up at the edge of forest along the Lugusida River, near the Forest Station on 22 December 1987. The buffy cap was easily seen. The bird then flew across the glade before disappearing.

Wattled Plover *Vanellus senegallus*

A single individual was observed for some time through a x45 spotting scope on 21 July 1988. It was on a football field of very short grass at the edge of the reserve, apparently foraging.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Although I have not yet observed this species within the boundaries of the forest, it undoubtedly occurs at the very edges. It occurs in Kakamega town and on 22 June 1989 I saw several at the village of Kambiri, which lies between the Kakamega and Kisere Forests.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*

A single female was flushed from a road in the reserve on 3 July 1990. She flew into a bush where I was able to observe her for some time from as close as 10 m. Its small size and long, graduated tail rendered identification very easy.

Red-headed Lovebird *Agapornis pulchella*

At about 07:00 hrs on 21 June 1988, I observed a pair of lovebirds fly in from north of the reserve, circle twice over the glade and then fly north again. Seen from below, both were bright lime-green except for the head and throat which were bright orange. During flight they called with high-pitched *cheewheep*. This is the only possible naturally occurring lovebird in the area, wandering from Uganda into extreme western Kenya (Britton 1980, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). Neither Fischer's *A. fischeri* nor Yellow-collared Lovebirds *A. personata*, both introduced to Naivasha, Nakuru, and Kisumu (Thompson & Karanja 1989), match this description. The only other possibility would be an escaped Lilian's Lovebird *A. lillianae* (native to Malawi and Zambia, Benson *et al.* (1988)), but escapes seem unlikely in this part of Kenya.

Spotted Eagle Owl *Bubo africanus*

A single sight record of a bird seen just before dawn in open secondary growth on 25 May 1990. A medium-large owl with laterally-projecting ear tufts, mottled chest, finely barred belly, pale mottling on the scapulars, and dark border to the face. The eyes appeared dark (though the light was poor), suggesting that it was of the subspecies *cinerascens*.

Horus Swift *Apus horus*

Small numbers (up to eight) of this species occur regularly in the company of White-headed Roughwings *Psalidoprocne albiceps* at Buyangu Hill in the reserve. Buyangu Hill is the site of a former murrum quarry; the banks of its numerous ravines are the nesting sites

of Little Bee-eaters *Merops pusillus* and the roughwings. These swifts had narrow white rump patches which extended down to the flanks, whitish throats which appeared buffy in some individuals (soil stained perhaps) and forked tails. Although noticeably forked when folded, when fully fanned out the tail looked almost squareish and for this reason I concluded that they were not White-rumped Swifts *Apus caffer*.

Eurasian Roller *Coracias garrulus*

A single individual was seen sometime between 3 and 8 December 1987 (the exact date was not recorded) on an exposed perch. The lack of tail streamers was clearly evident.

Rufous-crowned Roller *Coracias naevia*

A single individual was seen perched on a small bush on 18 February 1988.

Black-billed Barbet *Lybius guifsobalito*

The only record is on 13 April 1988, when one individual was spotted in a bush near the edge of the reserve before it flew across a football field and disappeared.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A single female or immature was observed for some time on 23 February 1988 perched on some cement blocks near the edge of the reserve where the grass was rather short. Above, the head and mantle were pale brownish-grey, the wings were darker greyish-brown. The forehead and chin were pale grey, lacking a brown tinge. The lower ear coverts, sides of the neck and breast were buff with perhaps a very slight pinkish tinge, fading to white on the lower belly and undertail coverts. It had an indistinct pale superciliary stripe and the lores were blackish. The tail was white with a broad black terminal band which was somewhat broader on the central tail feathers. It wagged its tail a lot when excited. Identification is based on the darker colour, slenderer shape, and smaller, straighter bill as compared to that of the Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina* illustrated in Heinzel *et al.* (1972).

Brown Parisoma *Parisoma lugens*

A single bird was captured in a mist net and photographed (but not ringed) in some dense bushes and thickets above a creek near the reserve headquarters on 30 June 1988. This small warbler was entirely dull brown above; tail sooty with outer tail feathers edged with white and the second pair tipped white. Below, it was indistinctly mottled white, dusky, and buff; centre of breast whitish; flanks and undertail coverts buffy. The bill was black, legs grey, and iris red-brown. Its wing measured 63 mm and it weighed 15 g.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Two were seen in the period 3 to 8 December 1987 (exact dates not recorded); one was in woodland and the other at the forest edge in mid-story. An additional individual was seen inside forest on 27 March 1988.

Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis*

A single male captured in a mist net, ringed and photographed on 10 May 1988 is my only record for this species. He was captured in nets set up in a grassland, at the edge of a marshy creek. The wing was 69 mm and the weight 20 g.

Zebra Waxbill *Amandava subflava*

I observed a single male, probably of the nominate race, perched in some tall grass for about 10 s on 20 July 1989, and a group of four birds were seen briefly in a marshy glade on 19 May 1990. The first bird seen was dull brown above, with a narrow dull red eyestripe. Below he had a yellow throat and an orange breast, blending into a salmon-red lower belly

and undertail coverts, and with some barring on the sides. He had a longish tail, much like a typical *Estrilda*. The bill was dark greyish or brownish.

Birds in QSD 48D but not recorded for Kakamega

In this section I briefly list 19 species which have not been included in the published literature cited but are recorded for QSD 48D. Since many of the bird atlas records are based on unpublished data (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), it is possible, even very likely, considering Kakamega's attraction to bird watchers, that some of these atlas records are from Kakamega. I include them here for the sake of convenience.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* not common, always near water.

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striatus* one record, 12 April 1988, on rocks in the Ishiku River.

Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus* one photographed flying overhead on 14 April 1988 and one seen perched 6 June 1988.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* uncommon.

Eastern Grey Plantain Eater *Crinifer zonurus* uncommon visitor to the extreme northern edge of the reserve.

Montane Nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* only one positive record, an individual photographed while incubating a single egg on 11 January 1988 in a bushed glade near the Isecheno Forest Station.

Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus cafer* uncommon, generally in disturbed grasslands; a pair was seen calling on 1 July 1990.

House Martin *Delichon urbica* a fairly common Palearctic winter visitor, from 30 November to 13 April.

Yellow-throated Leaflove *Chlorocichla flavicollis* while examining specimens of this species at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in order to confirm my identification of a group of three or four seen near the reserve headquarters on 1 July 1990, I came upon five specimens of the subspecies *pallidigula* which had been collected at Kakamega by K. Caldwell in 1924.

Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinerea* a male was seen in Lantana thickets at the north edge of the reserve on 12 Aug 1990.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* a Palearctic winter visitor from 11 December to 24 February.

Grey-capped Warbler *Eminia lepida* one sight record, in marshy thickets, and two birds caught in dense thickets on 14 March 1990.

Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis edoloides* uncommon, most frequently seen in the vicinity of the reserve headquarters.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* one record.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* one record, 5 April 1988.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* fairly common migrant, 11 to 29 April.

Fan-tailed Widowbird *Euplectes axillaris phoeniceus* although I did not observe this species at Kakamega myself, I include it because I discovered three Kakamega specimens, all adult males in non-breeding plumage, collected in March 1923 and February 1924, at the AMNH.

Yellow Bishop *Euplectes capensis* one male seen in mid July 1986 near Rhondo Hill.

Red-billed Firefinch Indigobird *Hypochera chalybeata* uncommon in short grass at the north edge of the reserve, including a singling male.

Hypothetical list

The following species have been seen briefly at Kakamega but not sufficiently well for a positive identification. Both are recorded for QSD 48D.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus beaudouini*

Black and White Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*.

New breeding records for QSD 48D

Blue-headed Coucal *Centropus monachus* two breeding records. The first was on 28 May 1989 when I observed a juvenile which still had very short rectrices being fed a large black caterpillar by an adult. The second was from 22 June 1989 when I flushed a bird from its nest situated about 1.5 m up in a clump of *Acanthus*. There was a single pale pink egg inside.

White-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis* two records of birds flushed off nests in grassy glades. The first, on 17 April 1990 revealed a patch of flattened dead grass containing two eggs, about 2.5 cm long, pale pinkish-cream with slightly darker, indistinct pinkish brown splotches. The second was a spot of bare ground near a termite mound with a single broken egg shell and a dead nestling reduced to a skeleton with some downy feathers. When the female flew off this nest, she had a short, flopping, laboured flight, apparently a distraction display.

Fan-tailed Warbler *Schoenicola platyura* two breeding records, the first being a nest containing two nestlings found low and well hidden in tall grass on 16 August 1989. The nestlings' flight and body feathers were beginning to emerge; the eyes were open. The second was an egg laid by a bird caught in a mist net on 29 May 1990.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* two breeding records. The first is a nest found tucked under a low (10–15 cm tall) clump of grass in a football field at the north edge of the reserve on 24 February 1988. It contained two eggs, but was subsequently abandoned, probably due to disturbance caused by children playing football. The second nest was found in the same general area (now a school yard) in grass about 10 cm tall on 23 April 1989. It contained three eggs.

Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* one breeding record, on 10 April 1989, of a nest well hidden in a thick mat of grass, containing three eggs.

Orange-tufted Sunbird *Nectarinia bouvieri* one certain breeding record, on 2 November 1987, near the Isecheno Forest Station. This was a grass nest, about 12 cm deep, suspended from a small shrub in grassland near the forest edge. It was lined with fine white plant down and had some green leaves woven into it. It contained two eggs which I estimated to be about 12 mm long. They were white with pale grey mottling. According to Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960), the eggs of this species have not yet been described. Only the female was seen at the nest but she was observed to join a male, upon whom identification of this species is based. Three other similar nests were found in the same glade on the same day, all in small bushes less than 30 m from the forest edge, but none contained any eggs or nestlings.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* three breeding records. The first of these, on 10 June 1989, involves two juvenile Pin-tailed Whydahs *Vidua macroura* begging from an adult waxbill. One of the whydahs and several adult waxbills were subsequently caught in mist nets. The other two records are of nests found near the ground under tussocks of grass. Both were ball type nests with an entrance funnel and both contained an open-sided compartment of 'cock's nest', on top, lined with feathers. The nest found on 27 June 1989 contained six eggs, that on 28 June 1989 one egg and two nestlings. The nestlings were naked and had their eyes closed, but were about twice the size of the remaining egg.

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REVIEW

The birds of Liberia (West Africa). A preliminary list with status and open questions by W. Gatter, 1988. Munich: Verhandlungen der Ornithologischen Gesellschaft Bayern 24: 689–723. Size 160 x 239 mm, softback, pp.35 including one line map. Price US\$5 or DM6.

This booklet begins with a brief summary of the limited attentions that this west African country has received from ornithologists. This section is followed by concise but comprehensive summaries of topography, climate and the principal vegetation zones. The extensive ecological degradation that has occurred in Liberia is made clear by a few, brief statistics. Only 38 per cent (42 000 km²) of the country's once ubiquitous forest cover remains at the present day and, by 1987, the whole of this meagre percentage with the exception of a single national park had been leased as timber concessions. Liberia's forests have been disappearing at the rate of 400–500 km² per annum since 1980.

The main bulk of this book consists of a 28-page annotated list of the country's 590 bird species which, in addition to English and scientific names, gives highly abbreviated information on status, abundance, habitats and distribution, as well as listing 'open questions', i.e. pointing out where knowledge of each species is lacking. The text is completed by acknowledgements, a brief summary in German of the introductory sections, and a bibliography of sources not mentioned by an ornithological summary of the country published in 1930.

This useful booklet is the most modern source on Liberia's birds, and a commendable compilation. The information given for each species is a little brief, however, and the author must have, for example, various seasonal data, no matter how rudimentary, on such factors as occurrence of vagrants, breeding seasons, and Palaearctic and intra-African migrants, that could most usefully have been included. There is no indication whatsoever as to whether the Palaearctic species winter in Liberia, or are only seen on passage. The Lesser Jacana is listed simply as "V?", i.e. of uncertain occurrence as a vagrant, whereas its text space could more profitably have been used for very brief mentions of areas and dates. The occurrence of the Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* has been rejected but, again, if the species is worthy of mention in this list, it would also be worth mentioning whence in the country the rejected record(s) originated; and, since they are often omitted by lists of this type, are there any feral populations of this species in Liberia's towns? The additional space necessary for the inclusion of such useful data as these could have been created by omitting the list's subfamily headings, which are largely superfluous here, by abbreviating both scientific and English nomenclature where possible, and by not displaying the list's annotations in columns, which look very neat but make for large areas of blank, wasted space. The English nomenclature in particular contains misspellings (Lemmon Dove, Lizzard Buzzard, Lesser Jakana, etc.) and inconsistencies (Tinkerbird and Tinker-Bird, Bee-eater and bee-eater, Guinea Fowl and Guineafowl, etc.) which are unfortunate in a work of this nature.

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